



California Department of Transportation Transportation Planning Grants FY 2008-09

- Environmental Justice: Context-Sensitive Planning
- Community-Based Transportation Planning
- Partnership Planning
- Statewide Transit Planning Studies
- Transit Technical Planning Assistance
- Transit Professional Development

TIPS AND POINTERS

The following Tips and Pointers were compiled to help applicants prepare their proposals for a Transportation Planning Grant.

1. Clearly state the purpose and need. Rather than make a sweeping statement about past problems and inequities, be concise about defining the transportation barriers and problems that confront your community and how you plan to address them. Applicants can define their purpose and needs, such as better access to jobs and health care, safer access to schools and playgrounds, speeding traffic and air pollution, impact of heavy trucking on local streets, inadequate transit services, promoting more in-fill development, or reducing congestion.

Past applications that were NOT competitive dedicated lots of writing to “injustices” or “impacts” and failed to define the transportation and planning issues and how they would be addressed through community involvement in planning. The documents of planning need to be objective and readable.

2. Clearly define the community, its boundaries, ethnic make-up, languages spoken, income levels, and transportation issues. This helps identify a community's conditions and needs. For example, the Environmental Justice: Context-Sensitive Planning grant program is aimed at helping low-income, minority, and Tribal communities, so it is important to research this information and state it clearly.

Past applications that were NOT competitive sometimes stated that some Hispanic and Asian “dialects” were spoken in the community and then proceeded to develop plans for revitalizing their downtown businesses to boost tourism and shopping. An applicant’s ability to identify the demographics and even the language barriers of a community helps strengthen the perception that you are able to promote environmental justice and community involvement in transportation planning.

3. Include digital photographs and maps of the community. Photographs help support an application because they help convey a complete picture of a diverse community, the condition of its streets and housing, and its transportation problems. A clear map helps locate a community within a city or county.

Past applications that had digital photos and maps generally stood out for the grant evaluation teams. Applications from one area of the State may be evaluated by persons in a different area. Visual information helps support and enhance the application. For awarded grants, we will encourage grantees to take digital photographs of community meetings, focus groups, field trips to critical sites, and conceptual renderings to help document the work.

4. Practical purposes and outcomes are encouraged. A good application should always try to achieve the achievable. Setting realistic goals and outcomes that a community can understand, accept, and take ownership for in order to address real issues of mobility, access, equity, safety, and economic opportunity are going to be more impressive than a study that does not have an obvious, practical outcome. The final results of these grants should lead to the adoption, initiation, and programming of transportation improvements that improve mobility, access, and economic vitality.

5. Address real needs. If one of the issues affecting a community's ability to participate in planning is that community members speak primary languages other than English, then the public participation portion of the planning process must logically include a more proactive, bilingual outreach. California is becoming a larger and more diverse State, and there are demographic changes that are driving the way we conduct planning and community outreach. Competitive applications must reflect that awareness and sensitivity.
6. Adhere to your original plan and partnerships. While circumstances can change, the Department awards these grants based on a specific purpose, scope of work, and partnership with a community. This means conducting planning with communities in a thoughtful and sincere manner. We discourage the submission of grant applications with the attractive goal of helping a community's mobility, livability, and safety if there is any doubt you are able to undertake the necessary partnerships to do the planning.

After a grant is awarded, changes to the Scope of Work that change the "spirit and intent" of the project are not allowed.

7. Set a realistic project timeline and budget. Applicants are sometimes tempted to request the maximum amount without regard to the scope of work or reasonableness of costs. Funds under the grant programs are limited, so the evaluation team will be looking very closely at any large requests for funding.

Timelines need to be realistic and allow sufficient time for hiring consultants, organizing and convening community meetings and focus groups, hiring interpreters (if needed), conducting surveys and analysis of the findings, and preparing final reports and recommendations.

8. Understand and follow planning terms. Many terms, such as livable communities, sustainable communities, equity in planning, context-sensitive solutions, in-fill development, transit-oriented development, and neighborhood revitalization are in vogue with planners.

Many grant applications in the past have used these terms liberally, with less regard for their original meaning and purpose. Applicants often use these phrases but fail to define them or integrate them into the Scope of Work. Understanding these terms and reaching agreement with potential partners on how they relate to the actual planning and outcomes will generally result in a better application and an easier roadmap to follow if a grant is awarded.

9. Public participation and stakeholder involvement are essential. A competitive application will provide concrete project-specific tasks to perform outreach and engage the public. Community awareness, acceptance, and involvement in the planning process are vital ingredients that cannot be overstressed. When communities feel a sense of ownership to the planning because their needs, issues, and concerns are being expressed and considered, there is greater momentum to the entire planning process that helps the work reach a beneficial end. Environmental Justice: Context-Sensitive Planning and Community-Based Transportation Planning grants are intended to help diverse communities become partners in planning.
10. Connecting the dots and proofread the application. When submitting a proposal for a Transportation Planning Grant, it is important to tie each step of the planning process together to reach a logical and beneficial end. Having others critically proofread the application for clarity and flow will be helpful. An application that is difficult to read with omissions and errors can convey a lack of good planning and purpose. In the past, the best applications were a complete package without being wordy, because they presented a clear purpose and need, a clear picture of community demographics and profiles, specified the issues and barriers, laid out the steps of community involvement and information gathering, and brought community members and diverse agencies together in a common effort to identify potential solutions.